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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000185

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KCOR](#) [KDEM](#) [PINR](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: ANTI-CORRUPTION AGENCY WADES INTO CONTROVERSY OVER
PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS

REF: BAGHDAD 120

Classified By: ANTI-CORRUPTION COORDINATOR JOSEPH STAFFORD, REASON 1.4
(B AND D)

SUMMARY

11. (C) The Commission on Integrity (COI) acting head, Judge Rahim Al-Ugaili, criticized the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) for failing to vet educational certificates submitted by candidates in the upcoming provincial council elections. Rahim had previously announced that the COI, in its examination of around 3,000 certificates, had uncovered 65 forgeries. IHEC head Faraj Al-Hadeiry, responding to Judge Rahim, gave assurances that the IHEC would also vet the certificates, adding that any winning candidates found to have submitted forged certificates would be barred from occupying their council seats. Knowledgeable sources claimed that the COI's inspection of certificates was in response to complaints from the Dawa party about forged documents allegedly submitted by ISCI party candidates, particularly in Diwaniya and Muthana provinces. We are scheduled to meet January 26 with Judge Rahim and will obtain further details on the COI's review of certificates. END SUMMARY.

CRITICISM OF INDEPENDENT ELECTORAL COMMISSION

12. (U) On January 22, Judge Rahim Al-Uqaili, acting Commissioner of Iraq's leading anti-corruption agency, the Commission on Integrity (COI), issued a press statement criticizing the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) for "insufficient efforts" to vet the educational certificates submitted by candidates in the upcoming provincial council elections to demonstrate fulfillment of educational qualifications required of candidates. According to media reports, Judge Rahim said the COI, having received from the IHEC the educational certificates for the 14,431 candidates nationwide, had noted that none of these documents had been previously vetted by the IHEC. (NOTE: The COI is reviewing candidates' certificates under its mandate to probe allegations of "falsification of public documents," and we gather that it has received such allegations in connection with some candidates' certificates. END NOTE) He said that the COI had so far been able to review only about 40 percent of the certificates and would not be able to examine all prior to election day. Judge Rahim stated that following the elections, the COI would ensure that all certificates submitted by winning candidates would be examined.

13. (C) Judge Rahim's rebuke of the IHEC followed his announcement January 19 that the COI had at that juncture discovered 65 cases of forged certificates out of a total number of around 3,000 examined. In his statements he has refrained from identifying the candidates submitting the falsified documents. In a recent conversation with the Embassy's Anti-Corruption Coordinator's Office (ACCO), Judge Rahim indicated that he would forego any public mention of those candidates found to have submitted forged documents in

the COI's review in order to avoid "needless disruption" in the election campaigning.

THE IHEC'S RESPONSE

14. (U) In response to Judge Rahim, IHEC head Faraj Al-Hadeiry (spelling) told the press that the IHEC's delay in vetting candidates' documents was due to the lack of time to do so during the tight interval between issuance of the law governing the provincial elections and the actual polling date. The IHEC chief added that his organization lacked the "advanced technical means" that would have been required to vet adequately the deluge of certificates presented by the 14,431 candidates. Although the COI will continue its vetting, Al-Hadeiry gave assurances that the IHEC would also vet the certificates and continue to do so after the elections; he also asserted that any winning candidates found to have submitted a forged certificate would be barred from occupying their council seats. Another IHEC official, Saad Al-Rawi, was quoted as saying that the political organizations sponsoring the candidates were to blame for failing themselves to vet the latter's certificates. Al-Rawi also observed that many candidates had studied abroad and that obtaining certificates from overseas educational institutions had been a lengthy process.

PRESSURE FROM THE DAWA PARTY?

15. (C) Knowledgeable sources at the COI confided to us that the COI's inspection of candidates' educational certificates

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was in response to complaints to Judge Rahim from Dawa party officials about opposing candidates supported by the ISCI party allegedly submitting forged certificates. According to these sources, the complaints centered on the Diwaniya and Muthana provinces, and the COI was focussing its scrutiny on certificates in these two provinces.

COMMENT

16. (C) Given the thousands of anti-corruption cases currently being investigated by the COI -- with its limited investigative resources -- Judge Rahim's willingness to shift focus from those cases to the inspection of candidates' educational certificates is noteworthy. In past conversations with us (e.g., per reftel), he has decried "political interference" in the COI's work, but our sources above indicated that on this occasion he was bending to pressure from the Dawa party to act promptly on their complaints. ACCO is scheduled to meet with Judge Rahim January 26; we will use the occasion to obtain an update on the status of the COI's review of certificates and the precise reasons for his decision to grab media headlines with his public criticism of the IHEC. END COMMENT

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